

Sometimes You Lose Them

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Does he fail?

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Sometimes You Lose Them

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"Please accept our most gracious thanks, Sir Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Sir Anakin Skywalker." The Novarrrian, Jokat, bowed at the waist, his two long, many-jointed arms bending and waving in intricate patterns. "Without your help, we would have lost not only our home, but also a quite lucrative business."

Obi-Wan felt an amused snort attempt an escape at the Novarrrian's words. A lucrative business, indeed! But, he kept his face composed as he bowed his head solemnly in turn. "We are honored to assist you, Magistrate," he intoned graciously. He peeked out the corner of his eye at Anakin, to his right, to make sure the boy extended the same courtesy. Anakin followed his master's lead, nodding his head gracefully. Good. Obi-Wan had been worried the boy was not paying attention.

Behind them, Republic guards somberly guarded the ramp to the red ambassadorial ship, awaiting the signal to depart. Obi-Wan was glad to be leaving this business behind, so he could get on with the difficult task of training the boy.

A week earlier, Obi-Wan and his apprentice of only four months had been sent by the Senate and the Jedi Council to Rem Novarris to help negotiate the validity of a contract between the planet's now deposed leader, Rolan, and the new Viceroy of the Trade Federation. Rolan, as was traditional on Rem Novarris, had assumed ownership of both the planet itself and the great corporation that controlled its trade interests upon his election to Chief Executive.

What was not traditional was that he had turned around and sold his world to the Trade Federation for an enormous sum, planning to take his riches and run. The Trade Federation had been poised to take control of the planet, not with a droid army as they had attempted on Naboo, but with ownership papers.

The planet's much-chagrined executive board had contacted the Senate, pleading for intervention. It had not taken much persuasion on the Novarrrians' parts-- the Trade Federation was already in public disfavor over the Naboo fiasco. The Senate reacted quickly, requesting that Obi-Wan and his new apprentice accompany a crack team of legal advisors to Rem Novarris to mediate the dispute.

The mission had been successful, as the advisors had discovered a legal loophole in the contract and Obi-Wan had exposed the identities of Rolan's unscrupulous business cadre. Anakin had even helped as well, using his impressive technical know-how to reconstruct transaction data from chips Rolan had erased. Thankfully, it was a tidy resolution for all involved. All except for perhaps the Trade Federation, who had accepted the termination of their contract but were not particularly pleased about it.

Obi-Wan had been surprised at being chosen for this particular mission, however, both because of his own unfamiliarity with financial law and the young age of his apprentice. He had at first wondered why the Senate had not sent an older, more experienced Jedi Knight and Padawan to assist the negotiators. He had quickly learned upon his arrival, however, that his recent experiences with the Trade Federation as well as his newfound fame and popularity had made him a great favorite of the Novarrrians. And this successful completion of his mission had placed the Senate in a favorable light with the Republic's member worlds.

Obi-Wan somewhat resented being reduced to the level of a public relations ploy, but he took heart in the fact that good had come of it. The planet's people were safe from outside ownership, at least for now.

Jokat straightened and spoke again. "And under your advisance, we plan to rewrite our planetcorp charter to divide ownership more equally between our citizen shareholders. And from this day, all business transactions will be recorded on devices such as the one Sir Skywalker designed for us, so they cannot be altered. We owe you so much, honored Jedi." Jokat bowed and repeated the convoluted arm movements.

Sighing inwardly, Obi-Wan bowed and mumbled acceptance of the Magistrate's thanks once again. He was truly grateful to have helped the planet's inhabitants, but the past days of dealing with complex and unfamiliar corporate law and the polite but financially-minded Novarrrians had taken its toll on his patience.

Of course, it hadn't helped that Anakin had been difficult. Obi-Wan had been trying unsuccessfully for months to keep Anakin focused on his Jedi exercises, but the boy was too easily distracted by events and people around him. Once he had discovered the challenge of reconstructing the data chips, for example, he'd been impossible to shake from his resolve to complete that task. And while it had ended well, with the boy succeeding beyond all expectations, Obi-Wan was still disturbed by his inability to keep Anakin's attention on the bigger picture--the need to be trained before attempting to right wrongs. While he was undeniably powerful with the Force, Anakin wouldn't listen to directions. At least from Obi-Wan.

Deep down, Obi-Wan wondered if the problem was not with the apprentice, but with the Master. While he had promised his beloved, dying Master to train the boy, it had thrust him in an undeniably difficult position. That one, vicious twist of a Sith blade into Qui-Gon's body had plunged Obi-Wan into a new role as a Jedi Knight, on his own for the first time. The abrupt change in his situation was further destabilized by the addition of responsibility for the boy.

And while Obi-Wan truly didn't regret his decision to honor Qui-Gon's dying request, and indeed found the boy to be bright and talented, he knew the bond between the new Knight and Padawan wasn't what it should be, wasn't strong. In his deepest, most secret heart, Obi-Wan couldn't help feeling that Anakin resented him for not being Qui-Gon-for having survived when his Master did not.

He'd tried being patient with the boy, being kind and indulgent. But it didn't appear to be working. Qui-Gon would have told Obi-Wan to seek out the living Force, to use it to understand the boy. But Obi-Wan couldn't manipulate his own feelings the way Qui-Gon had. He'd learned the hard way that you couldn't always get close to things.

Glancing at his Padawan again, Obi-Wan could detect no trace of unease or dissatisfaction in the boy's face at the moment. On the contrary, the boy was positively beaming, proud of himself and truly glad to have helped the Novarrrians. Whatever his other faults, Anakin was unceasingly eager to help others. As Qui-Gon had told Obi-Wan soon after freeing the boy from slavery on desolate Tatooine, Anakin aided others unselfishly and knew nothing of greed.

Obi-Wan realized that Jokat had resumed speaking, and returned his attention to the Magistrate. Why can't he thank the legal advisors for a while, and let us leave, he wondered briefly, but immediately felt guilty for the uncharitable thought. The Novarrrians had plenty of data-pushers. Jedi were a novelty.

"To show our appreciation, we wish to bestow upon each of you a share in our planetcorp," Jokat beamed at them, and turned to signal an underling to fetch the docu-chips. "With ownership of these shares, you will also be granted honorary citizenship on Rem Novarris. We will be pleased to have you visit us often."

Obi-Wan was momentarily shocked at the offer. From working with the financial wizards earlier in the week, he knew such shares were worth fortunes. The Novarrrians must be immensely grateful, indeed! Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Anakin's blue eyes widen and his mouth

gape in surprise. The boy quickly overcame his astonishment, however, and if possible, grinned even wider than before. Anakin obviously understood the worth of such a gift as well as Obi-Wan.

But to accept such a gift was impossible. "Honored Magistrate, we thank you for your extremely generous offer," Obi-Wan inclined his head and continued. "But as you may not know, as Jedi we cannot accept reimbursement for our services. Our code forbids it. Your gratitude and the safety of your people are reward enough."

He looked to Anakin to see that he nodded courteously as well. Obi-Wan was dismayed, however, to note a look of chagrin on the boy's face. Surely he didn't want the money for himself? What was the boy's problem?

Anakin turned to Obi-Wan with a betrayed expression. When he noticed the displeasure on his master's countenance, however, he quickly schooled his features and nodded curtly to the Magistrate. Obi-Wan filed the look away for future discussion.

The Magistrate hadn't appeared to notice the byplay between the two young Jedi. He bowed yet again, and shook his head in confusion. "I do not understand, but I accept your refusal. I am not offended." He stood and regarded Obi-Wan regretfully. "The shares we prepared for you will be invested in our planet's legal department, then. And you will still be welcome here, shareholders or not. I bid you gracious farewells." He backed away, arms and elbows waving.

"Thank you, and farewell," Obi-Wan spoke, and after a second's hesitation, Anakin repeated after his master. The Jedi turned and raised their hoods, and without further words, boarded their transport home.

The Republic cruiser sliced silently through space on its two-day trip back to Coruscant. In the small cabin shared by Jedi Knight and apprentice, silence ruled as well. Barely a word had passed between the two since their departure four hours earlier. And now, Obi-Wan sat crosslegged on the floor, eyes closed, while on a chair, Anakin thumbed listlessly through a Jedi codebook. Obi-Wan had handed it over earlier with curt but not unkind instructions to "memorize."

Anakin was too restless to read, however, and soon his fidgeting began to wear on Obi-Wan's concentration. Bringing himself out of his Jedi meditation, he leaned back on his hands and turned his eyes upon Anakin questioningly.

After a couple of moments, Anakin seemed to realize he was being stared at and looked up at his master, pouting. It didn't take him long to speak his mind.

"Why couldn't we have kept the shares?" Anakin blurted out, staring Obi-Wan directly in the eye, almost accusingly. "Wouldn't it be better to take the money and use it for a good cause? Wouldn't that be helping people? Now the Novarrrians will just spend it on more legal mumbo-jumbo. We could have helped people," he repeated, his voice fading on the last few syllables. He tore his gaze from Obi-Wan's blue stare and watched his own thumbs fiddle with the book

some more.

Obi-Wan grinned inwardly. The book was going to fall apart from Anakin's fidgeting any minute. But the boy's words were no laughing matter, and he answered them with the solemnity they deserved.

"There are good reasons for that rule," he informed Anakin in a kinder tone than he had used earlier. "Jedi are trusted above all others as mediators, and we have to uphold that trust. This way, everyone accepts our judgments. To receive monetary rewards would forever taint trust in the impartiality of the Jedi."

Anakin wasn't impressed, however. "But the Jedi could do even more if they wanted to, if they had money." He looked at Obi-Wan again, earnestly. "They could feed more planets, they could, they could rebuild after disasters. They could free slaves...."

Ah. So that was the boy's problem. Obi-Wan had deduced from Qui-Gon's description of the boy's life on Tatooine that Anakin wanted to become a Jedi to free his mother and his friends. He'd told Qui-Gon he'd dreamed about it, even. Such a sum as those Novarrrian shares were worth would easily acquire the freedom of thirty slaves.

"Jedi do those things, without money, Anakin," Obi-Wan pointed out reasonably. "And we even manage to uphold the Republic's anti-slavery laws--"

"But what about places that aren't in the Republic?" Anakin blurted out feelingly, interrupting his master. "Don't they deserve justice too?"

Obi-Wan sighed. This wasn't going to be easy. "Of course they do, Anakin. But they have to ask for our help." He stood and walked over to kneel on the floor in front of the boy. "Slavery is bad, wherever it happens. But we can't just jaunt about non-Republic space, tossing around money and righting every wrong. Imposing our value system on those who don't want it would not inspire trust in the Jedi order. How would it look if wealthy Jedi ran around the galaxy, purchasing slaves? Whether we freed them or not, how would that look?"

Anakin bowed his head. "It wouldn't look so bad, to me." He raised his eyes once more to his master's. "Qui-Gon did it, to free me. He even gambled. See? And my winning that money in the Boonta race for Qui-Gon let you fix your hyperdrive and take the Queen to the Senate. So money did good there, didn't it?"

Obi-Wan winced. The boy had a point. But he remembered being uncomfortable with Qui-Gon's decision to gamble, and the Jedi Council had been none too happy with it, either, or its result. Qui-Gon's last words with the Council had been strained, disapproving.

But then, that had always been Qui-Gon's way, and Obi-Wan had loved his master despite his unconventional approach to justice. He thought Qui-Gon had ignored many of the possibilities in the greater scheme of the galaxy, the unifying force that controlled their destinies. Qui-Gon been more worried about the living force, in caring about the beings around them. He had championed lost causes and would use whatever means necessary to do what he felt was important at the moment. Obi-Wan knew, deep down, that if Qui-Gon hadn't been one to

assist the downtrodden of the universe, then he himself might never have become a Jedi Knight. But that didn't mean he always had to agree with his Master's methods.

He didn't want to think about it any more, anyway. The thought of his lost friend still brought him pain, a sense of loss he knew he would never be able to remedy. You just couldn't get close to things...

"Qui-Gon...did what he had to do to save the Queen." Obi-Wan chose his words carefully. "You were an exception, as well. There are exceptions to the rules. But not many, and definitely not in this case. Be glad for what we have done, and let's have an end of it."

Far from comforting Anakin, however, these words seemed to frighten him. "Are you telling me, master, that I can't free slaves when I become a Jedi Knight?" Anakin was getting angry, now. "I promised my mother I would come back and free her. Would that make me bad?"

Obi-Wan wasn't sure what to say to that. "That would depend on your situation, when you were a Jedi Knight. The situation on Tatooine." He knew it would cause problems, but he decided to be honest with the boy. Qui-Gon had been unfailingly honest with him, and his own apprentice deserved no less. "There's a chance that, yes, it could be wrong."

The boy's face reddened with rage. He jumped up from his chair and pointed a finger accusingly at Obi-Wan. "You just don't want that to happen, do you? You don't want me to free my mom. You don't care about her, you don't even know her!" Anakin turned on his small heel and started to stalk from the room. "Qui-Gon cared. I know he did. But you don't. You only kept me around because you feel guilty."

There it was. Obi-Wan had been right about the source of Anakin's frustration. But he didn't have to be pleased about it. He felt a flash of irritation at the boy's unreasonableness. He thought he'd been a kind and fair master so far--what did the boy want from him? But he quickly tamped down his annoyance. He needed a cool head to deal with this situation. The slave issue was causing a rift in an already precarious relationship. What could he do about it?

Swiftly, he reached out and gripped Anakin's arm, stopping him from running out the door. "You're right, Anakin, I didn't know your mother." Obi-Wan gazed intently at his charge, trying to gauge the reaction to his words. "But you're wrong about my feelings. I do care about your situation. I want to see you succeed. That's why I'm being honest with you."

"Sure you do," Anakin muttered, still angry, unbelieving. "Please let me go. I want to check on that droid I repaired last week. I'm free to go, aren't I? I promise not to free any slaves on my way to Engineering." Anakin regretted his own rudeness immediately, but he was so upset he didn't care if he angered his new master. He only wanted to get away.

Obi-Wan had to take a deep breath to calm himself before answering.

He repeated a litany to himself, one he used often to help him deal with the boy: He's alone, and afraid. He's alone, and afraid. He's alone, and afraid.

To be truthful, Obi-Wan knew how Anakin felt. But the boy still had to realize just who here was the Knight and who the apprentice. He retained his grip on the boy's arm a few moments longer.

"Don't be angry, Anakin. Anger belongs to the darkness. It taints your actions." He paused to let that sink in. He'd drilled the dangers of anger and fear into the boy from the day he'd taken over his training. "I taught you calming exercises. Use them."

Within himself, Obi-Wan reached a quick decision. Maybe it could work...

"Check the droid if you wish, but return here within two hours, when you are feeling more reasonable. I will teach you a Jedi exercise, one that Qui-Gon taught me, long ago." There. The peace offering had been made. It was up to the boy to accept it. Obi-Wan released his arm.

But Anakin wasn't quite prepared to give in just yet. "Sure," he mumbled, not looking at Obi-Wan. Then he ran out the door without a backward glance.

An hour and a half later, Anakin slowly made his way back to the quarters he shared with Obi-Wan. He had calmed his anger, but the fear was still there. Was Obi-Wan upset with him? Would he punish him? Would the exercise be painful?

He decided to be truthful with himself. No, he would probably not be punished. Obi-Wan wasn't exactly the warmest person Anakin had met, but he wasn't cruel, either. He hadn't beaten him or anything. Yet. And Anakin knew from talking with other boys at the Temple that he was lucky to be trained at all. He had been too old to start the training, and was, truthfully, too young and untrained to become a Jedi Padawan. He knew he should thank the Angels of the moons of Iego that Obi-Wan had agreed to take him on, dying Master or no.

But he couldn't help wishing Qui-Gon were still alive. Qui-Gon had walked into Watto's shop like a larger-than-life hero, complete with lightsaber, beautiful girl and expensive droid in tow. He had been kind to Anakin, and had believed in him unreservedly. More than that, Qui-Gon had freed him from slavery, and had promised to help him fulfill his wildest dreams.

To become a Jedi Knight! Such a fate was worth any amount of sacrifice. Thus, Anakin had decided to accept Obi-Wan's peace offering, even though he wasn't completely happy with the situation.

He couldn't help but feel that Obi-Wan just didn't care. Qui-Gon had radiated caring. Obi-Wan radiated....nothing. He was just so, so, well, cold. Even when he'd told Anakin that Qui-Gon was dead, he'd betrayed no emotion. His face had been set, hard, as rigid as the faces on the statues encircling the Senate chambers. Had Obi-Wan even been concerned that he'd lost his Master? Anakin couldn't understand

it.

Finally reaching the door, he depressed the buzzer and called out his identity respectfully.

Obi-Wan, of course, had known Anakin was coming, but decided to accept the boy's respect graciously. He used the Force to depress the door controller from inside, and gestured for Anakin to step into the room.

"Good evening, Padawan." Obi-Wan nodded his head civilly. "Are you ready to begin the exercise?"

Anakin took his cue from his master, and, hands behind him, bowed his head in return. He realized they were to start over, and that knowledge lifted a weight from Anakin's shoulders. "Yes, Master."

Obi-Wan nodded, then briskly turned and gestured downwards, drawing Anakin's eyes to the carpet. "Then choose a seat, and we will begin the exercise."

Anakin grinned in surprise at the small joke. Both the room's chairs had been pushed away, facing the walls. He sat himself on the cleared space in the center of the room.

Obi-Wan sat down across from Anakin, crossing his legs Jedi-style. He raised his hands palms-up in front of him, as if there were an invisible wall between himself and the boy. "Place your palms against mine, and close your eyes," he instructed his apprentice. "Use the Force exercise I taught you to clear your mind. I'll know when you're ready."

Not another calming exercise! Anakin sighed and did as he was instructed. He'd always imagined Jedi training as endless hours of tremendous leaps and lightsaber swinging. Never in his wildest dreams would he have thought Jedi sat around all day, meditating on the Power of the Force. And now he was having to hold hands while doing it. Ick.

Obi-Wan closed his eyes as well, sensing Anakin's acceptance of his instructions. He wondered briefly whether he was right to try this particular ritual. The boy was new to this, and probably wouldn't be able to perform his part properly. And then there was the problem of connection. This exercise required trust between Knight and apprentice, and trust wasn't something they shared in abundance.

He remembered the attachment he'd felt to Qui-Gon, almost from the beginning. They had been thrown together by accident, on separate missions to the same planet. The result was that he'd become Qui-Gon's apprentice, almost as if fate had intended it to happen.

In a strange way, Obi-Wan felt that same fate had meant for him to train Anakin. But destiny had certainly dealt him a difficult hand. It had given him an apprentice that didn't seem to care, and didn't seem to want to be with him.

Obi-Wan knew his bond with the boy was slight at best, and at worst, nonexistent. He opened his eyes to watch Anakin, almost deciding to

call the whole thing off. But he stopped himself. He had to get through to the boy somehow. Perhaps this exercise was one way to do it, one way to form a bond. Without it, they could never trust each other, and disagreements, like that over the slave issue, could never be resolved.

"Anakin, this is a simple trust exercise. We will use the Force to form a connection, with our minds and bodies." The boy was silent, listening, and Obi-Wan continued. "Trust is involved because of the intimate sort of contact it creates. Jedi employ techniques such as this to see through each other's eyes, and their thoughts. This can be very powerful--sometimes through the connection we more easily see the future, or the past."

Anakin's eyes opened, full of surprise. "We might see the future?"

Obi-Wan grinned. "It can be used that way. But we will not go that far. We will just establish a connection, and visit another place. It may be somewhere you know. I want to see if you can describe it to me."

Anakin squeezed his eyes shut, interested in the challenge despite himself. Obi-Wan watched him for a moment, happy with their progress so far. He needed to show the boy what the Force could do, and what he could learn if only he would let Obi-Wan teach him.

He found his eyes drawn to the boy's hands against his own. They were so... small...Obi-Wan was not a particularly big man, but Anakin was diminutive for his age.

He wondered if he'd looked so tiny, so fragile, to Qui-Gon, all those years ago. Qui-Gon had been a big man, a regular giant. Had his own Master once marveled at his miniature apprentice, wondering if he was doing the right thing?

Qui-Gon Jinn looked down at the fourteen-year-old boy seated across from him, eyes closed. Obi-Wan was concentrating well, doing a good job of preparing himself for the exercise. He let his gaze slide down to their joined hands. The tips of Obi-Wan's fingers barely reached to Qui-Gon's knuckles. Had he himself ever been that small? He didn't think so.

Qui-Gon had always been tall. Master Yoda had even joked about it once, in a rare moment of humor--he'd told Qui-Gon upon his ascension to Jedi Knight that he'd grown a foot for every year of his apprenticeship.

Qui-Gon closed his eyes. Was he doing the right thing? Obi-Wan had proven himself a fine apprentice so far. He was dedicated and courageous, and he'd improved substantially in controlling his emotions. But he had trouble attuning himself with the living Force. The boy sometimes made friends, and had formed a strong connection with his Master, but he spared nary a thought for the majority of the living beings around them. He spent too much time watching the stars--almost as if he could read the past and future in them--and too little time watching what happened right next to him. Qui-Gon sometimes wondered what went on in that head of his.

He decided now was not the time to worry about it. He concentrated on his apprentice's progress, and found him calm enough to continue with the trust exercise.

"Now even your breathing," he instructed Obi-Wan, speaking softly so as not to break the boy's concentration. "Be aware of every breath you take, the flow of air through your lungs. Be aware of the beating of your heart, of the flow of blood through your veins. Feel how the Force flows through you. You must be aware of yourself before you can feel the awareness of others."

Qui-Gon sensed the boy complying, and then followed his own instructions. In. Out. In. Out. The minutes stretched, the room silent except for the even breathing of the two Jedi.

"Now stretch your awareness outwards. Not too far, only to me." Qui-Gon's softly-spoken words caused barely a ripple in the calm of the moment. "Match your breaths with mine, your heartbeats with mine."

Like synchronizing clocks, Obi-Wan thought briefly, complying with his Master's instructions. As calm as he was, he didn't find it difficult. He could begin to feel Qui-Gon's presence adjusting to his own, could feel his Master's pulse in the palms beneath his fingertips. As if they were connected physically, like twins that hadn't separated at birth. It was a strange feeling, but comfortable, somehow.

Qui-Gon spoke quietly again. "Good. Now open your mind, as I have. As our bodies attune, so will our minds. Tell me what I'm thinking, if you can. What I'm doing. What we're doing."

Obi-Wan concentrated for a few moments. A picture, a Force vision, glimmered in his head, then became clearer. He was on a planet, a rocky one. They could see trees in the distance, and a purple-blue sky above, but all around them were dusty, yellowed rocks.

"We're walking. We are on a mountain. A high one." Obi-Wan formed the words slowly, softly. "We can see for miles around. This is a desolate place, but beautiful."

Qui-Gon mentally nodded. "That it is. We'll take a look around. Tell me what you see."

Obi-Wan complied. The room around him, the floor beneath him, all had faded away to be replaced by the dusty vision, a gift of the Force. Of his physical self, he was only aware of their breathing, his hands joined with his Master's. The rest of him was lost in a haze, in the odd experience of looking with someone else's eyes, thinking with someone else's thoughts. It was amazing. An intimate thing, frightening but comforting at the same time.

Obi-Wan quietly described everything they saw and felt. Intermittently, his Master asked him questions, forcing him to focus on details, the shading of a particular rock, the sound of an insect buzzing fifty yards away, the feel of the sun beating down on their head. As they walked in the vision, they neared a cliff.

"We look over the edge of the cliff. We're up very high," Obi-Wan

intoned. "We've kicked a rock, accidentally. It's falling off the edge...we can see it falling." They watched the stone tumble into the abyss below. The drop was dizzying, but Obi-Wan wasn't afraid. The Force was there, surrounding him, protecting him. His Master was there as well, his presence lending Obi-Wan courage. He thought he could never feel afraid again...

Years later, in a room aboard a Republic ambassadorial ship, the same exercise is underway. Another apprentice answers a Knight. "We're walking by a river. We're on Naboo. We recognize the city in the distance. The palace."

Obi-Wan was impressed. The boy was quick. "Yes, we are, and we do. But what is directly before us?"

"The river is going over a cliff, one of the big ones. It's about twenty feet away. The mist is very pretty. We want to walk to the edge and look over."

Obi-Wan was almost frightened at how easily the boy accepted and lived thoughts that weren't his own. Anakin was most definitely very strong in the Force.

"We're walking into the river. It's not deep, but we're getting our boots wet!" The boy continued, softly. "We're standing in the river, on the edge of the waterfall, looking down."

Companionably, they watched the play of light on the rapidly-flowing water, for minutes that felt like hours. Obi-Wan began to relax. Things were going well. The Force-vision he'd conjured was vivid, beautiful. He and Anakin had made the transition into another world without complications or recriminations. Perhaps he'd been right to try this. Perhaps they'd finally made a connection to each other, formed a bond.

The depth of the gorge directly before them was astounding, the water tumbling away into nothingness, but Anakin wasn't afraid. Obi-Wan could sense the security in him, much like he had felt with Qui-Gon. Obi-Wan enjoyed the connection, enjoyed the serenity of the moment, the cool mist rising from the waterfall.

He could almost feel his own, late Master's presence, standing there, watching the water, with him and the boy. How Obi-Wan missed him. Careful to shield his thoughts from Anakin, he allowed himself to remember the past, what it had been like to perform this exercise with Qui-Gon. He remembered the sense of security, of being protected, that he'd felt whenever his Master was near. How they'd looked down into the abyss, unafraid. He remembered watching the stone fall...

a burning flash of red on the water, sunlight reflecting rainbows, blinding him...

the sharp flash of a red lightsaber, shining brightly, wielded by a madman...

a single drop of water, flowing over a rock at the edge, the very precipice of the waterfall...

a man, stunned, hanging on the edge, the precipice between life and death...

the drop of water hangs an eternity, suspended in time. it begins its fall, the long tumble down from the eternal heights into the mist-enshrouded abyss, the nothingness, below.

the man falls, first imperceptibly, then unceasingly. neither can be stopped...

"No..." The thought tore itself from Obi-Wan's consciousness. This wasn't fair--he couldn't relive this moment. Not now, not ever.

And Anakin was here-- he had to keep control, to shield Anakin. That horrible moment was in the past-Anakin was the future. For months he had tried to keep the terror buried, deep, where it couldn't haunt or taint the job he had to do. He had shut his pain away from his apprentice, believing that to share his anguish, his desolation, would only frighten and upset the boy.

It's only a trick of the light, he told himself harshly. Just the water... He held the thought...

The small voice seemed to come out of nowhere, everywhere. "That was horrible, wasn't it? Watching him die."

Anakin spoke the words softly, but they shattered the moment with their certainty. Obi-Wan heard them in his head, his soul.

"It's too late. We can't do anything about it."

How was the boy reading his thoughts? The connection couldn't be that strong, could it? Obi-Wan tried to erase the memory, hide it again, where no one, not even his apprentice, could find it. This disturbing vision would be his, and his alone.

"We're sad. We're both sad."

Chilled at the boy's words, his own thoughts, Obi Wan decided the whole thing was out of control, and enough was enough. He'd failed. He'd been weak, letting the past intrude that way, and it was unfair to Anakin. The boy would never trust him now.

Slowly, Obi-Wan broke the contact.

A few minutes passed while both Knight and apprentice collected their thoughts, reorienting themselves to the present, to their room on the ship.

Anakin, still cross-legged on the floor, stared impassively at the seated and silent Obi-Wan, waiting for him to say something. He could sense his master's unease, and wondered at it. It was strange, knowing someone else's thoughts and emotions. Especially when that someone was Obi-Wan, who was normally so cool, so composed.

Strange as it was, however, Anakin didn't feel uncomfortable with this new empathy. It felt right, somehow.

Obi-Wan finally broke the silence. "I'm sorry, Anakin," he said with a worried look at the boy's stoic face. Still shaken, he turned his eyes downward, suddenly unable to meet his apprentice's unwavering blue gaze. "I....that wasn't supposed to happen."

We were supposed to use the Force vision to see and remember the beauty of Naboo, Obi-Wan thought to himself, not the horror, the death. It had been a mistake to go back there.

"That's okay," Anakin replied, hesitatingly. Why was Obi-Wan so uncomfortable? In a sudden moment of clarity, he knew. Knew Obi-Wan was angry at himself, for letting his emotions take control, even for one brief instant. For letting Anakin see what he'd tried so hard to conceal.

How could Anakin tell Obi-Wan that as horrible as the vision had been, he was somehow glad he'd seen it--had seen what really happened. At least now, he knew. And he was glad he'd shared Obi-Wan's sadness, too--it made his master appear more human, more approachable.

Emboldened by their new connection, Anakin continued. "I guess we were just thinking about him. It reminded you of him. You couldn't help it."

Obi-Wan looked up again. He didn't know what to say to that. He was surprised at Anakin's calmness, the acceptance. He'd expected anger, even hysterics. He could feel the strength, the Force, flowing from the boy in waves. The connection. Dare he hope? Perhaps he'd not failed as badly as he'd feared. He watched Anakin, silently, waiting.

"There was nothing you could do. And he's really gone." Anakin didn't want to say it, but couldn't stop the words. "I have to forget him, don't I?"

Obi-Wan's heart twisted at the words, but he grasped at the opportunity they presented. "Of course not. We couldn't. But you're right, there's nothing we can do about it. Except try to honor him. And move on."

"Move on." Anakin repeated Obi-Wan's words, testing them. They felt right.

Qui-Gon was dead--he was the past. But Obi-Wan was here, now. And he was part of Anakin's future. Through their new bond, the Force flowing around and through them, Anakin could somehow sense it. The destiny...for good or ill, they were in it together.

The future had to start now. "Master, I...ummm...I'm sorry, about what I said earlier. Earlier today, that is." Anakin gathered the courage to say what was necessary. "I was angry, and it was wrong. You taught me about anger. I just didn't listen."

Obi-Wan felt his heart lighten at the boy's statement. He had gotten through, after all. What he'd thought was a horrible mistake, the past come back to haunt him, the boy had turned into a learning experience--for both of them. The Force worked in mysterious ways. And like Qui-Gon had told him once, when the apprentice can teach the

master, the pairing is right...

"I accept your apology, Padawan," Obi-Wan informed him soberly. "And you will learn to control your anger. And I will be here to help you."

Anakin wasn't finished yet. "I have to be honest. I can't promise not to free any slaves, at least not ever, you know," he told his master. "But I'll try to do what's right. What you teach me."

"We'll deal with that when the time comes, Anakin. You never know what will happen. Always in motion, the future is."

Anakin giggled. "You sound just like Master Yoda."

Obi-Wan smiled back at his apprentice. "I do, don't I?"

End
file.